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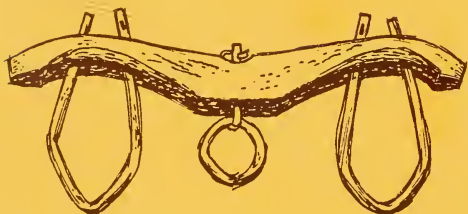
Bradley, Dr. Preston

Was Abraham Lincoln a
Christian?

Edward J. Jacob, Publisher

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**Was
Abraham Lincoln
A Christian?**

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WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

A LITTLE OVER one hundred years ago a noted New England scholar, William E. Channing, wrote an essay called "The Greatness of Napoleon." Dr. Channing mentioned three types of greatness: lowest in his estimate he placed the greatness of action, and to this category he assigned the militaristic Bonaparte; next he listed "intellectual greatness," a rank which could be given to such a statesman as Woodrow Wilson. Dr. Channing rated the remaining type far above the others.

"The first rank," he said, "is unquestionably moral greatness, or magnanimity; that sublime energy by which the soul binds itself indissolubly for life and for death, to truth and duty; scorns all meanness and defies all peril; withstands all the powers of the universe which would sever it from the cause of freedom; reposes an unfaltering trust in God in the darkest hour; and is ever ready to be offered up on the altar of its country and mankind." "Moral greatness," he added, "has much simplicity, is unostentatious."

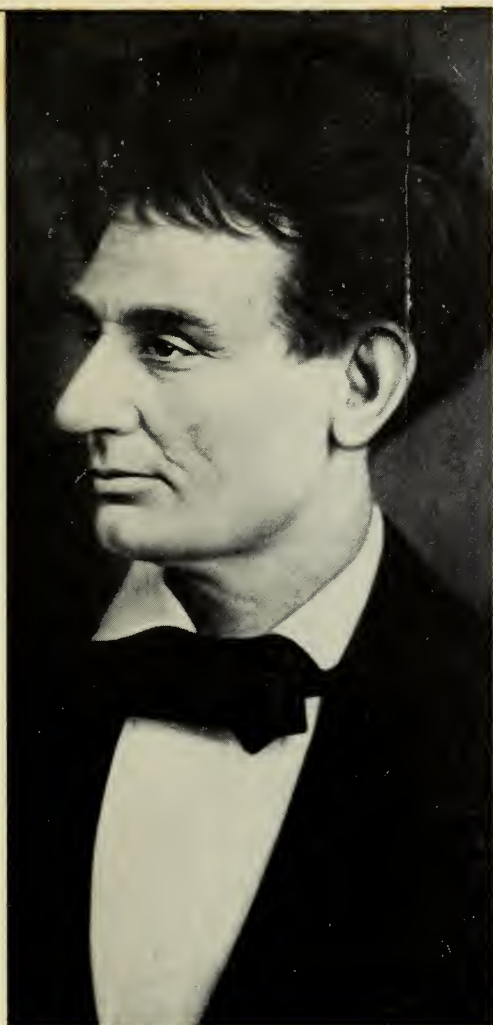
The parade of the centuries has turned up but a handful of men who have met these exacting requirements. In its one hundred and fifty years the United States has produced only one. About the time Dr. Channing was writing his essay, Abraham Lincoln, then a young storekeeper in an isolated Illinois village, was making his painful way toward such a destiny; for Lincoln gained enduring fame during the fearful crises of his presidency because he possessed, in addition to marked native ability and an abundance of common sense, the rare attributes of "moral greatness."

From the book *Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt* by R. D. PACKARD.

THE PUBLISHER of this booklet, through this medium, wishes to thank Mr. E. M. Hunt, formerly of Evanston, Illinois, and now of Berino, New Mexico, for this photograph of Abraham Lincoln. It has been in his possession for many years. On the back of this photograph, on paper yellow and fragile with age, was this inscription:

INTERESTING HISTORY TO LINCOLN PORTRAIT

This portrait of Abraham Lincoln, believed to be one of the best ever taken, has an interesting history connected with it. On July 4th, 1856, Princeton, Illinois, celebrated Independence Day in a spread eagle fashion. Mr. Lincoln was the principal speaker of the day. After the address, he was entertained at the home of Dr. S. A. Paddock. Mrs. Paddock asked Lincoln to sit for a picture for her, to which he consented and they visited the studio of W. H. Master, where this characteristic portrait was made. Mr. Lincoln enquired if his hair was alright? Without further preparation except to run his fingers through his hair, the result was as shown. Mr. S. G. Paddock, brother of Dr. Paddock, is now living in Princeton and says this statement is correct according to his recollection.



THE PRINCETON, ILL., PHOTOGRAPH
(JULY 4TH, 1856)

II AM VERY GRATEFUL to Dr. Bradley for giving me permission to publish this sermon.

Its publication gives me greater personal satisfaction than any other of the many Lincoln booklets I have issued the past 30 years.

In the words of Robert G. Ingersoll in his great lecture on Abraham Lincoln:

"Lincoln was the grandest figure of the fiercest civil war. He is the gentlest memory of our world."

EDWARD J. JACOB

February 12, 1949

WAS ABRAHAM LINCOLN A CHRISTIAN?

Sermon by
DR. PRESTON BRADLEY, *Pastor*
The Peoples Church of Chicago
(February 8, 1948)

IT WOULD NOT be an exaggeration to say of all the millions and millions of the peoples of the world who have lived and died since the recorded history of mankind began that no single individual of any race, any culture, with the exception of the Poet of Galilee, has ever had more consideration and more attention than has the life and character and personality of Abraham Lincoln. That seems all the more remarkable, if not incredible, when we think that he has been so recently with us in contrast to the long range of human history itself. To have plowed your way into the morality and ethics of a civilization within a hundred years after one's death is an achievement unparalleled in human history.

If we were to stop for a moment and make a contrast, and I hope I will not be misunderstood in this analogy, we observe that even in the character of Christ himself he did not impress the contemporary generation of which he was a part until more than

three centuries had passed away. Even tho the somewhat debatable conversion of Augustine and Constantine to the cause of the Christ of Galilee took place comparatively soon after the crucifixion of Christ, a conversion which, may have been for purely political purposes in widening the areas and boundaries of the Roman Empire and utilizing the psychological advantages of accepting a cross which was hated and despised by his people and his empire; but no man in human history so quickly after he had lived his life became the focal point of all the moral and ethical beauty that it is possible for the human consciousness to conceive, until when one stands in the presence of Abraham Lincoln one is aware that even tho he has not slumbered a hundred years in his own tomb he has implanted himself in the hearts of the ages. To live the kind of life that is so impressively great that one is virtually accepted for that greatness in a large part of human society indicates, a quality of soul, a degree of character, that cannot be considered, analyzed, looked at, or emulated too often in our daily experiences.

To me that is indicative of something in the mind and soul of Lincoln that immediately classifies him high on the list of the ten greatest people, by the norm of civilization, which civilization has ever produced. That does not mean that it is localized into one racial group, or identified with one special culture. When you talk about the world's great we must always consider the universal quality in our estimation of that greatness. There can be no great-

ness without the projection of the universal. Truly and eternally great people are great in every area, in every era, and in every culture. Greatness is not a qualitative attribute which can be possessed by races, by creeds, by nations; true greatness is always universal. That is why the geniuses of the world in every civilization and in every race always had the universal appeal. The great creative minds in the field of literature are accepted in every field of literary expression by every race and nation. Mazzini, the Italian philosopher of democracy in Italy, was one of the greatest democratic philosophers that civilization has yet produced. Every word he uttered was a universal truth in the philosophic thinking of democracy. He did not belong to Italy, he belongs to the world. He was one of the sources from which Abraham Lincoln derived some of his concepts of the philosophy of democratic action and vitality.

The immortal and eternal Socrates, probably one of the most heroically minded minds that civilization has yet produced, — Greece owns no mortgage on Socrates, he is a universal mind, of the subsoil that nourishes the cultures of all subsequent time in every part of the world — that is the universal mind.

In the empires of the world it is the universal mind that makes the contribution to subsequent history. It is true of Russia. The true soul of interpretive genius, in the reactions of the slave to the Christian ethics of Christ is Tolstoy, and Tolstoy the Russian is Tolstoy the universal, and it is not until we know Tolstoy in his reactions against the ethics

of Christ or we see him in the greatest creative work in many respects of fictional history, the monumental volume "War and Peace" — that we find the mind of Tolstoy, and what is it? A universal mind.

The greatness of Britain is never to be found in the magnitude of the diplomatic concepts of a D'Israeli who dug a ditch in a desert waste and called it the "Suez Canal" and presented his sovereign, Victoria, with the Empire of India, the collapse of which is being evidenced all about us today, but the part of Britain and the contribution which she gave to civilization that will not collapse is the mind of the universal Shakespeare, and out of that mind of the universal do we see the possibility of an integrated world. It is not the Britain of the King and the Queen, it is not the Britain of the Prime Ministers and the self-interests that lives, it is the Britain of John Stuart Mill, and the Britain of John Milton, and the Britain of Wilberforce and of Shakespeare, and all of these minds were universal minds. And when the history of America is written in the cultural, ethical and moral life of the world, it will not be the history of a flag planted upon the islands of the sea, which was the beginning of a world relationship among the nations of the earth, it will not be the dollar sign, it will not be the height of buildings, it will not be those shimmering lines of steel that cross a continent, it will not be in the bigness of an industrial civilization, it will not be the perfection of the mechanistic gadgets that we claim so essential to the comfort of a modern world; when

the history of America is written in the centuries which are yet to unfold in the evolution of man toward the attainment of the high estate, it will be from the mind of Lincoln, and Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Thoreau. It will be from the minds of the universals that shall reach out as the waves reach out when a pebble is dropped into the sea. Those waves never come to a rest until they touch the far-off shores of the most distant coastline. So in the culture of a civilization it will only be when the emanations of the thoughts and spiritual vitality of that civilization touch the distant shorelines of human history, that there will be the reverberations of the universal. The one man, almost alone, alone, exclusively in the history of our nation to have swept the horizon history is the miracle of Abraham Lincoln.

And even tho no man has been given more careful, analytical, penetrating, thoughtful analysis of every influence that touched his personality in an effort to explain him, no man has explained him. Within the month I spent more than three hours with Carl Sandburg. I was present at that little group that assembled here in the heart of Chicago to help Carl Sandburg commemorate his own seventieth birthday. I have known Carl Sandburg, intimately for more than thirty years, and I said to him on that occasion, "Probably you, *you*, of all the men I know who have studied Lincoln, have spoken about him, and written about him, and deciphered him, you of all his friends and his foes" (for Lincoln

has some very ardent and persistent foes who base their judgment upon their own prejudices and have not the sweep of the universal things in their own hearts) ; I said to him, "You of all the men I know, with your monumental portrait of the Prairie Years, and the War Years, and The Life of Lincoln, you understand him best," and then I had the presumption to say to him, "Carl Sandburg, I think I know why." Lincoln has had many biographers, among them his own dearest and nearest associates in his law firm who saw him every day, who knew him in politics, and saw him go out into the heat and turmoil of political life. All kinds of people have written and spoken about Lincoln, but it remained for Carl Sandburg to really reveal the heart and soul of Lincoln. And I said, "Carl, I think I know why. It is because there is a spiritual law in the universe, in the cosmos, and that spiritual law basically conditions personalities and principles so that like attracts like, and your sense of the universal, and the Lincoln spiritual emanations of the universal, united you together, and your eyes could see what materialistic brutalities could not penetrate, your heart understood what hearts conditioned by political animosities could not fathom. You consorted with the universal and you found Lincoln."

I challenge any student here today, (and I am inspired by the number of young people in this congregation this morning,) . . . any student in any high school, college or university, anyone interested in Lincoln, I challenge you to explain

Lincoln on any other basis than to be found in the universal concepts of his mind and heart. You cannot explain him on the basis of heredity. Dale Harrison Richards published lately Lincoln's own biography which he wrote in 1859, the year before he was elected President, at the request of Jesse W. Fell of Bloomington and Normal, and I challenge any student to explain him by his heredity. There is no social background that so many people consider very important today. His mother rested upon a straw mattress and the mattress rested on a dirt floor in a little log cabin that had but one window. You cannot explain him by what his father did or was, or his grandfather, or his greatgrandfather, or his mother, grandmother, or greatgrandmother. Don't try to explain Lincoln on heredity, you cannot do it. Don't try to explain Lincoln on environment; you cannot do it. Don't try to explain Lincoln by a merely academic education in the way we think of it. Lincoln could cipher to the rule of three, he learned writing and reading. He knew not a word of Latin, Greek or foreign language. There is no possible way in which you can explain this man by the standards that are usually applied as we seek explanations of other people. You cannot explain him by any of these things. There is only one answer. History does not make men; men make history, and all human personality is the pattern of the cosmos. I say to you as certainly as I stand in this pulpit this morning that there is no way to explain certain things that take place in the historical processes of

men and society except in terms of that pattern. Nobody yet knows why Japan did not follow the attack on Pearl Harbor by taking Hawaii, the Aleutians and Alaska. Nobody today can tell us, and I asked General Eisenhower that question once here in Chicago, after Dunkerque, why Hitler did not invade England and the peace be made in Buckingham Palace. No one knows. There are great moments in history when something walks into the situation that stands inexplicable in the minds of men and they try to analyse and figure it out and speak about it and discuss it, and they give this and that reason, and it all tumbles down until you are face to face with a pattern of human history that will not stand defeat or deflection. So I believe *there are moments in human history when God steps into the affairs of men!*

We may be very close to one of those moments now. I think we are, and when that moment comes you will see a personality arise whose contribution in that moment may make our vision clear. There may be much about him that would be subject to criticism and antagonism as there was with Lincoln, but the work is done, the personality lives!

How insignificant then does the character and spirit of Lincoln become if we try to put it into the mould of one church, creed, or religion! *Abraham Lincoln knew not the narrow sectarian boundary lines of creed or church, he belonged to them all and he belonged to none!* It is only in the divine paradoxes of life, when one can belong to them all and

belong to none, that you sweep the universal in the mind of the eternal. So the little, petty emphases and quarrels and theological bickerings of quasi illiterate people, and the fear and superstitions that have motivated so much religion, had nothing to do with Lincoln. He stood above them all in his great sweep of the universal. Just as another stood when he was able to say: "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

That is the universal, and in the final manipulation of nations and men in that final and ultimate synchronizing of our modern civilization that is inevitable, when that moment dawns, when the nations and the races of the world know that self-preservation demands self-development and cooperation, when we catch the spirit of that and the universality of Christ percolates into the human consciousness, then you will see the greatness of the true contribution of Abraham Lincoln, the universal, a reality, not merely a hoax, a *reality!* That is why Lincoln lives and will live!

Why do great and eternal men live? Why does Socrates and Plato and Christ and Lincoln live? Why are they alive now? Why are they more alive than they have ever been? Why do they live? *Because they are eternal, and eternal men don't die, and eternal principles don't die, and the civilization that stays will be the civilization built upon those eternal principles!*

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I insist that if there is anything which is the duty of the whole people never to intrust to any hands but their own, that thing is the preservation and perpetuity of their own liberties and institutions.

— ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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